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ABSTRACT

Cooperating teachers (N=95) completed a survey on their attitudes toward multicultural content infusion by student teachers. Cooperating teachers appeared to hold some misconceptions regarding multicultural curriculum transformation, and their criteria for evaluating multicultural content activities tended to focus more on their ease of integration into previously designed curriculum plans than on curricular effectiveness and appropriateness. Many also expressed the opinion that there was insufficient time to implement multicultural lessons in public schools, and that multicultural education was low on a long list of curricular priorities. Student teachers were found to lean toward using approaches considered most practical by their cooperating teachers. It is argued that teacher education programs need to provide clear expectations for multicultural content infusion during student teaching, and that teacher educators also need a long-term relationship with cooperating teachers to enable them to fully appreciate the constraints teachers face in trying to change the classroom curriculum. (Contains 38 references.) (PB)

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Multicultural Content Infusion by Student Teachers: Perceptions and Beliefs of Cooperating Teachers

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association
April 18-22, 1995, San Francisco

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Multicultural Content Infusion by Student Teachers: Perceptions and Beliefs of Cooperating Teachers

Abstract

In an effort to determine how cooperating teachers think about multicultural content infusion by student teachers, "Levels of Integration of Multicultural Content" by James Banks was used as the theoretical framework for understanding the beliefs and perceptions of cooperating teachers. The data from a survey of 95 cooperating teachers was analyzed by (a) scoring the number of responses in each of Banks's levels of multicultural content integration and (b) describing the relative frequency and qualitative importance of topics raised by the cooperating teachers. Cooperating teachers tended to favor approaches for student teachers based on ease of application into previously designed curriculum plans and seem to hold misconceptions regarding multicultural curriculum transformation. Student teachers appear to utilize the approach considered most practical by their cooperating teachers. Teacher education programs will need to collaborate with cooperating teachers to move away from approaches that are most convenient within a given classroom to those most desirable for pupils receiving a curriculum in a culturally diverse society.

Multicultural Content Infusion by Student Teachers:

Perceptions and Beliefs of Cooperating Teachers

by Michael Vavrus & Mustafa Ozcan

Nationally educators continually stress the need for preservice teachers to gain familiarity and competence for infusing multicultural content into the K-12 curriculum. Imbedded within this expectation is the desire to have a teaching force with a deeper understanding of the relationship of the school curriculum to a pluralistic society (Tyson, H., 1994; Zimpher & Ashburn, 1992). For teachers to interact effectively with diverse cultural groups outside the standard school boundaries, they must hold a knowledge base sensitive to the conditions of people historically placed on the margins of society's political and economic activities (Collins, 1993).

How to reach the goal of a culturally responsive teaching force through teacher education remains enigmatic. For prospective teachers gaining appropriate pedagogical skills in multicultural education, an introductory experience through one course in the teacher preparation curriculum appears inadequate (Bennett, 1989; Bliss, 1990; McDiarmid & Price, 1990). Even when multicultural information that reduces the stereotyping attitudes of preservice teachers is included in the teacher preparation curriculum (Tran, Young, & DiLella, 1994), both student teachers and practitioners generally do not demonstrate competence in applying a curricular knowledge base with multiple perspectives and the interconnectedness of various cultures' histories (Banks, 1993b, 1994; Garcia & Pugh, 1992; Vavrus, 1994). Research is inconclusive on the added value of multicultural education when teaching experiences with culturally diverse student populations are taken into account (Brown & Kysilka, 1994; Grant & Secada, 1990; Rios, 1991).[1] Compounding this dilemma is the continuing dominance of an Eurocentric orientation toward schooling which either excludes or places on the curricular margins multicultural content (Banks, 1993b, 1994; Collins, 1993; Estrada, K., & McLaren, P., 1993; Gollnick, 1992b; Irvine, 1992; Martin, 1991; McCarthy, 1994; Watkins, 1994).

Few studies and reviews are available which analyze the multicultural education pedagogy of teacher preparation programs when delivered throughout an entire curriculum and into the

student teaching phase (Gollnick, 1992a; Grant & Secada, 1990; Mason, 1987; Ramsey, Vold, & Williams, 1989; Spears Oliver, & Maes, 1990). Although research data is also limited on how cooperating teachers interpret the infusion of multicultural content into the school curriculum by student teachers, Haberman and Post (1990) indicate that multicultural orientations of cooperating teachers are skewed to individualistic, psychological models rather than toward group or societal perspectives. During student teaching cooperating teacher attitudes toward multicultural education affect the context in which student teachers must enact lessons with multicultural content (Garcia & Pugh, 1992; Nel, 1992). A more thorough understanding of how cooperating teachers approach multicultural education would provide teacher education programs an increased understanding of the classroom setting where multicultural content infusion is an expectation for student teachers (Goodwin, 1994; Grant & Secada, 1990) and would serve as an information source for programs seeking field sites conductive to the development of multicultural competencies for preservice teachers (Haberman & Post, 1990).

Purpose and Theoretical Framework

Learning how cooperating teachers think about multicultural content infusion by student teachers is the purpose of this study. Our study has two primary dimensions: (a) determining cooperating teachers' perceptions of the orientations for infusing multicultural content into the curriculum by student teachers and (b) ascertaining cooperating teachers' beliefs on the appropriate level for student teachers to infuse multicultural content. Often multicultural approaches are undifferentiated, enabling practitioners to report a high correlation between their preservice experiences in multicultural education and their eventual instructional strategies in teaching assignments without regard to the nature of the multicultural content (see McDaniel, McDaniel, & McDaniel, 1988). In order to distinguish more clearly the multicultural curriculum orientations of cooperating teachers, we chose "Levels of Integration of Multicultural Content" by James Banks (1988; 1993a, chapt. 10) as the theoretical framework for analyzing the cooperating teachers' beliefs and perceptions. This theoretical construct involves four levels of approaches:

(1) contributions: focuses on heroes, holidays, and individual cultural events;

(2) additive: adds content, concepts, themes, and perspectives to the curriculum without changing its structure;

(3) transformational: changes the structure of the curriculum to enable students to view concepts, issues, events, and themes from the perspective of females and diverse ethnic and cultural groups; and

(4) social action: enables students to make decisions on important social issues and take actions to solve them (Banks, 1988, 1993a).

In a hierarchical order of complexity and quality, beginning with the contributions approach and moving up to social action, these four abstract categories were used as ideal types (Weber, 1978). Though these levels are presented in their pure forms, they may be overlapping or blended by teachers in actual teaching situations(Banks, 1993a).

When teachers adopt a contributions approach, the structure and goals of the standard curriculum remain unchanged. This level is frequently utilized when a teacher first attempts to integrate multicultural content into the curriculum since it is the easiest for teachers to use. The next level, the additive approach, as it name implies, adds multicultural content to the curriculum while maintaining a mainstream perspective (Banks, 1993a). The transformative approach, however, represents a move toward academic knowledge which

> consists of concepts, paradigms, themes, and explanations that challenge mainstream academic knowledge and that expand the historical literary canon....[under the assumption] that knowledge is not neutral but is influenced by human interests, that all knowledge reflects the power and social relationships within society, and that an important purpose of knowledge construction is to help people improve society. (Banks, 1993b, p. 9)

The highest level in Banks's model, social action, requires the implementation of the theory of social reconstructionism (Zeichner, 1993) in the context of multicultural education (Grant & Secada, 1990).

Method

A survey instrument developed for qualitative analysis was sent to all cooperating teachers in our teacher preparation program for the 1993-94 academic year. Ninety-five surveys out of 115 cooperating teachers were completed and returned (82.6%). The cooperating teachers provide supervision in their classrooms for teacher education students from Clarke College, Loras College, and the University of Dubuque, three private liberal arts institutions with a single education department accredited as a consortium by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. Since 1979, prospective teachers in Iowa have been required to take a course devoted to multicultural and nonsexist education with a focus on creating positive attitudes among teacher candidates toward culturally diverse groups (Iowa Department, 1977). Located in northeast Iowa along the upper Mississippi River, the consortium's region includes rural southwest Wisconsin and northwest Illinois. The demographic composition of Dubuque, the region's primary urban center and the site of the three colleges, reflects a nineteenth century German and Irish Catholic heritage.

The data we collected were qualitative data in nature. Teachers answered open-ended questions to reflect their perceptions and beliefs on the approaches for integrating multicultural content. They stated both their ideas about approaches to multicultural education and their observations of student teachers in the infusion of multicultural content into the standard curriculum. The data -- that is, teachers' answers -- were analyzed to discover the patterns in the infusion of multicultural content into curriculum.

Provided with the four approaches and corresponding definitions, cooperating teachers were first asked to identify "the approach(es) you professionally judge that your student teacher used when infusing multicultural concepts into his/her lessons" and then to describe any difficulties they perceived their student teachers may have had with multicultural content infusion. The other part of the survey asked, "Which of the approaches do you, as a cooperating teacher, believe are most appropriate for student teachers to utilize?" with a follow-up opportunity to explain their respective reasoning for their responses.

Data was initially analyzed by scoring the number of responses in each of the four levels of multicultural content integration. First, cooperating teachers' perceptions of the actual level of infusion by student teachers were recorded, followed by a noting of cooperating teachers' beliefs about the most appropriate level for student teachers to be using. Aggregated information was also analyzed according to the teaching assignments of cooperating teachers, i.e., regular or special education and grade level.

For the narrative data, content analysis was used to describe the relative frequency and importance of topics raised by the cooperating teachers. Tables were created to categorize these responses. The data in the tables represent the explanatory statements by cooperating teachers regarding any difficulties student teachers may have encountered in multicultural content infusion and the thinking of cooperating teachers on the most appropriate levels of multicultural curriculum integration for student teachers. Data was further analyzed by the level or approach cited by the cooperating teachers as well as their respective teaching areas and grade levels. Cooperating teacher responses were also compared to an earlier study of actions and attitudes reported by student teachers in a similar survey (Vavrus, 1994).

Results

From the sample surveyed, 74% of the cooperating teachers indicated that student teachers use more than one approach. As seen in Table 1, the additive approach is noted most often and is followed closely by the contributions approach. The transformational and social action approach, third and fourth respectively, were reported much less frequently. Nineteen percent of the sample noted that "all" or "any" of the approaches are appropriate for student teachers. Although not completely congruent, these results suggest a pattern similar to cooperating teacher beliefs on the ideal level for application by student teacher (see Table 3).

Forty-two percent of the cooperating teachers reported that student teachers have difficulty with multicultural content infusion. About an equal number, 17%, of the total sample reported the source of the difficulty as either student teacher preparation in multicultural education or a

combination of teacher perceptions centered around a limited time for meeting infusion expectations and negative attitudes toward multicultural education (see Table 2).

Mentioned the most frequently, the additive approach is considered the most appropriate level for student teachers by 45% of the cooperating teachers. At the other end of the spectrum, 18% of the teachers thought the transformative approach is suitable for student teaching. As indicated in Table 3, 19% of the cooperating teachers responded that "any" or "all" of the approaches are fitting for student teachers. These latter responses appear to stem from cooperating teachers confusing Banks's (1993a) curriculum approaches with either learning styles, such as a teacher reasoning that pupils "need various ways to learn," or teaching styles as evidenced by another teacher explaining that multicultural approaches ought to be determined by "whatever student teachers feel the most comfortable with and feel they are able to teach successfully."

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the four approaches according to the reasons teachers favored a particular level of multicultural content inclusion. The most common explanation, reported by cooperating teachers for favoring the additive and contributions levels, was based on ease of application into their previously designed curriculum plans. The second most frequent reason pertained to the belief in the appropriateness of multicultural content for the pupils of cooperating teachers. The least common reason rationale was their concern with the limited time for student teaching and the perceived competence of student teachers.

The reasons given by the cooperating teachers for selecting the transformational and social action levels tended to note neither ease of application nor the student teachers competence. The one common refrain was that these levels were best for their pupils. The social action approach was perceived by the largest subset of cooperating teachers favoring this level as one that student teachers could accomplish. Most responses were unique and vague. That is to say, the rationale generally given by the cooperating teachers for their selecting the transformational and social action approaches were not similar to nor consistent with the reasons given by Banks (1993a) for selecting these levels.

Discussion and Implications

A close examination of the qualitative research findings imply some potential shortcomings relevant to the multicultural education knowledge base held by cooperating teachers and conveyed to student teachers. Cooperating teachers appear more comfortable with the additive and contributions approaches which may mirror their overall backgrounds in multicultural education. Cooperating teachers also tend to lack consistent criteria in choosing the approaches for integrating multicultural content into the curriculum. The overall rationale for selecting the levels of multicultural content integration had less to do with curricular effectiveness and appropriateness for their pupils and more with issues of classroom efficiency such as ease of application by the student teacher. The nature of the contributions and the additive approaches lend themselves to the least amount of curricular modification and may also account for the cooperating teachers' choice of these two approaches. For example, the additive approach for one teacher was supported because it "does not cause large disruptions to existing curriculum." This aspect of the study suggests that, in comparison to Banks's (1993a) hierarchy, cooperating teachers generally hold low expectations for student teachers infusing multicultural content into the curriculum.

Cooperating teacher attitudes in these instances could be a function of the fact that an inadequate subject knowledge base, such as in multicultural education, results in inflexible curriculum implementation by teachers (Walker, 1990),[2] thus holding "a basic skills orientation to teaching that seems to render multicultural concerns superfluous" (Grant & Secada, 1990, p. 418). Limitations on the possibilities for multicultural content integration are further confounded by those cooperating teachers who view multicultural education as "not applicable" and feel "too pressed for time to just 'change' the curriculum to include MCNS [multicultural non-sexist] education." One declared, "Our students are starting to feel 'stuffed' with Multicultural Education; we can't do anymore without facing a backlash!" Another recommended,

> College professors ought to spend a few weeks in our junior highs and high schools to get a feel for what real problems we as teachers face and I think you'll find Multiculturalism way down the list.

Cooperating teachers' reasoning for selecting the transformational and social action levels overall suggests that they do not understand the conceptual construct involved in transforming the curriculum (Banks, 1993b) and fail to grasp what social action actually means for the classroom curriculum. Cooperating teachers appear to lack a multicultural education grounding in the implications for critically transforming the curriculum to eventually include social action. Although cooperating teachers cite the appropriateness of the social action approach, the study shows no indication that social action activities as defined by Banks (1993a) and others (Grant & Secada, 1990; Zeichner, 1993) were actually being planned and enacted by student teachers. Because multicultural education is a continuing manifestation of the civil rights movement, change and action are embedded expectations of multicultural education and inherent contributors to tension with the conventional, Eurocentric academic curricula (Watkins, 1994). Since most teachers are less interested in curriculum development and "simply want a good set of written curriculum guidelines to use so that they can devote their attention to working with students" (Walker, 1990, pp. 229-230), cooperating teachers may perceive transformative approaches which require a fundamental change in the curriculum beyond the norm of their job role. "When the student teacher gets a full time job," reasoned a cooperating teacher, "he/she may not be able to make major changes in his/her curriculum." Consequently, cooperating teachers may not look at multicultural curriculum transformation and social activism as the job of the teacher and, therefore, see it as an inappropriate experience for individuals becoming teachers.

Since all student teachers take a course in multicultural education prior to student teaching, it is likely they were aware of the Banks' hierarchy for moving to the transformational and social action levels. However, the responses of the cooperating teachers coupled with other studies of student teacher multicultural content infusion (Garcia & Pugh, 1992; Vavrus, 1994) suggest that, regardless of student teachers' previous knowledge, student teachers tend to pick up the approach considered most important and practical by their cooperating teachers and are discouraged from attempting the higher levels of Banks' model. These factors may be attributed to cooperating teachers who impose their ideas of multicultural education on student teachers and/or to student

teachers who look up to cooperating teachers as significant models of teaching. Either way, the beliefs of cooperating teachers about multicultural education appear as an influential variable on the teaching expectations and behaviors of student teachers.

The results of our study suggest that teacher education programs need to make operational to cooperating teachers expectations for multicultural content infusion during student teaching. In our case, having 17% of the cooperating teachers consider student teacher preparation in the application of multicultural content as inadequate when aggregated across all approaches intimates that more attention is also needed in curriculum and instruction methodology courses to multicultural content integration in the design of lessons. One teacher, mindful of potential demands when moving up Banks's (1993a) hierarchy, pointed out that "transformational and social action require a great deal of planning that is not introduced in an effective manner in [the student teachers'] education (methods) courses." Realizing that the four approaches imply a sequence of developmental stages through which teachers may pass as they develop lessons with multicultural content, a cooperating teacher advised, "Student teachers need to work from the basics [e.g., additive level] so they can develop confidence through success. Too much experimentation [e.g., transformation] can lead to confusion and chaos." When working together on developing multicultural education competencies of preservice teachers, both teachers educators and cooperating teachers must initially take a collective shift in focus away from what is most efficient within a given classroom to what is most desirable and effective for pupils in a culturally diverse society.

A grasp of content infusion at the additive and contributions levels will demand less explanation than at the transformational and social action levels. Mindful of the history of the originators of social reconstructionism in the 1930s, teacher educators hoping for cooperating teachers to adopt a social action approach on their own may again be a "miscalculation" founded on "an optimistic yet unfounded" (Watkins, 1991, p. 34) sense of teacher agency. Indeed, infusion at the latter two levels, requires teacher educators to collaborate with cooperating teachers in a deeper exploration of what it means to approach curriculum transformation and social action from a

critical orientation. A cooperating teacher sympathetic to the multicultural goal of social action cautioned that "this would take some years building."

Collaboration on multicultural education with cooperating teachers implies a long-term commitment mindful of the various constraints teachers work under when attempting to change their classroom curriculum (Walker, 1990, chapt. 10). Collaboration also involves an understanding of cultural fits in a curriculum (Peshkin, 1992) as well as giving attention to the relationship that must evolve between teacher educators and cooperating teachers for teachers to realize the role of curriculum developer (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). Collaboration between cooperating teachers and teacher educators on multicultural education is fraught with anxiety for providing an environment conducive for student teachers to become culturally responsive educators with their own pupils because, as Sleeter (1991) explains, "helping students articulate, critically examine, and develop their own beliefs and action agendas for emancipation of oppressed people is very difficult; it is not discussed sufficiently by multicultural education practitioners or theorists" (p. 22). Nevertheless, lasting benefits may begin to accrue to both teacher education programs and local school districts when beginning the process of collaboratively seeking to conceptualize multicultural content infusion around the model of Banks (1988; 1993a) for the purpose of widening the dialogue on the meanings and interpretations of a multicultural curriculum for application by a new generation of teachers.

Notes

[1]In a study of urban teachers in culturally diverse settings Rios (1991) found that teachers were minimally engaged in multicultural education, leading him to conclude that "simply putting teachers in multicultural contexts is not going to guarantee a more sophisticated thinking about multicultural education" (pp. 194-195). Although Grant and Secada (1990) report "experiences with representatives from diverse populations are worthwhile for teachers," they also caution that any positive gain seems "predicated on the student [teachers'] and teachers' having support mechanisms...[and] some external motivation for their efforts" (p. 418). This condition is

reinforced by observations from Brown and Kysilka (1994) of a student teacher who failed to make apparently obvious connections with her unit on Mexico and the Mexican heritage of some of her students: "This student teacher most likely saw multicultural and global applications as a technical demand of the curriculum, not as an extension of pupils' learning or a celebration of an individual's background and culture" (p. 314).

[2]Walker (1990) explains that "teachers whose knowledge of a topic is too limited can only implement a curriculum in a rigid way" (p. 359).

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Table 1.

Approaches Used by Student Teachers to Integrate Multicultural Content into Curriculum as Reported by Cooperating Teachers

Assignment Level	Contributions Approach	Additive Approach	Transformation Approach	Social Action Approach	Total
PK-K, Regular Ed.	6	8	4	2	20
PK-K, Special Ed.	5	4	1	1	11
1-6, Regular Ed.	28	34	18	9	89
1-6, Special Ed.	5	5	5	5	20
7-12, Regular Ed.	19	22	9	7	57
7-12, Special Ed.	1	4	2	2	9
Total	64	77	39	26	206

Note. Total n = 95; total notations = 206.

Table 2

Source of Difficulties Student Teachers Encounter in Infusing Multicultural Content into Curriculum as Reported by Cooperating Teachers

Assignment Level	Pupils' mental and social characteristics	Limitations of curriculum, topic, and/or time	Lack of knowledge and experience of the student teacher	Negative cooperating teacher beliefs about multicultural education	Total
PK-K, Regular Ed.	-	2	2	-	4
PK-K, Special Ed.	2	-	-	1	3
1-6, Regular Ed.	-	-	9	2	11
1-6, Special Ed.	4	3	1	-	8
7-12, Regular Ed.	1	5	4	4	14
7-12, Special Ed.	-	-	-	-	-
Total	7	10	16	7	40

Note. Forty teachers out of 95 said that their student teachers had difficulties in infusing multicultural content into curriculum.

Table 3.

Most Appropriate Approach(es) for Student Teachers to Integrate Multicultural Content into Curriculum as Reported by Cooperating Teachers.

Assignment Level	Contributions	Additive	Transformational	Social action	All/ any	Others	Total
PK-K, Regular Ed.	1	4	-	2	-	-	7
PK-K, Special Ed.	3	3	-	-	-	-	6
1-6, Regular Ed.	12	18	10	11	7	3	61
1-6, Special Ed.	3	2	2	3	4	-	14
7-12, Regular Ed.	7	14	5	7	7	2	42
7-12, Special Ed.	-	11	-	2	1	-	14
Total	26	52	17	25	19	5	144

Note. Total N = 95 with 5 not responding to this item; total notations = 144.

Table 4.

Cooperating Teachers' Reasons for Favoring Individual Approaches

Approach	Time set for student teaching	Level of student teacher competence	Beneficial for pupils	Fits curricu-lum	Ease of applica-tion	Other	None	Total
Contributions	3	2	6	5	10	-	-	26
Additive	7	7	8	15	7	-	-	44
Transforma-tional	-	-	4	3	-	4	6	17
Social action	-	-	8	2	1	-	5	16
Total	10	9	26	25	18	4	11	103

Note. From total N = 95, 90 teachers responded to this item; multiple approaches reported by cooperating teachers (see Table 1).